



**In Support of Raised H.B. 7125 AAC Parity for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder**

**March 5, 2019**

To: Rep. Sean Scanlon, Co-Chair  
Sen. Matt Lesser, Co-Chair  
Members of CT General Assembly's Insurance and Real Estate Committee

Dear Rep. Scanlon, Sen. Lesser, and members of the Committee:

I am a resident of Middletown CT, a former member of the Connecticut House of Representatives (1979-90), and I am currently employed as President and CEO of Mental Health America (MHA), the nation's leading community-based nonprofit dedicated to promoting the overall mental health of all Americans. I regret that a prior commitment in Kentucky made it impossible for me to share these views with you in person at your public hearing.

MHA traces its roots to the Connecticut Society for Mental Hygiene, now Mental Health Connecticut. Mental Health Connecticut is currently our Connecticut state affiliate and it is coordinating support for this legislation. MHA works to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness, including prevention services for all; early identification and intervention for those at risk; integrated care, services, and supports for those who need them; with recovery as the goal.

In other words, we believe in acting "before stage four," long before mental health concerns become mental health crises. Realization of parity is an essential part of our mission.

For far too long, we have accepted separate and unequal care for people living with serious mental health and substance use conditions. Restricting access to needed treatment and demanding that people become sicker before we help them get well has never been good public policy. Any short-term savings has always resulted in greater longer-term costs. During my time in the state legislature, those past-due bills were paid primarily in state hospitals. Today, you pay them in corrections.

As the parent of a now-adult son with a serious mental illness, I have experienced this up close. Out-of-network providers, excessive levels of "pre-approval" review for necessary care and treatment, restricted access to medications and medication assisted treatments, and

nonquantitative treatment limitations that made little clinical sense – and in the long term little financial sense, either – have been part and parcel of my family's experience for more than twenty-five years.

Through the federal Mental Health Parity legislation sponsored by Rep. Patrick Kennedy and others in 2008 the Federal government laid the groundwork for true parity. But that legislation – and legislative initiatives that followed, including the Affordable Care Act and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act – rightly deferred to the states for much of the enforcement of parity.

That's why H.B. 7125 is needed. It will set up the proper reporting mechanisms, pull together the data needed to enforce parity, add substantive provisions, and build on the bipartisan foundation already laid by the federal government.

For so many of us who need you to act, this is both a professional and personal appeal. I urge you to move this legislation forward. Similar legislation came close last year before dying during the session's last days. Let's not let that happen again.

You have my personal and professional pledge to work with you and your colleagues in any way I can to help you get this through this year.

Please feel free to contact me at any time at [pgionfriddo@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:pgionfriddo@mentalhealthamerica.net).

Sincerely,



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